fanfiction edition

GETTING YOUR BEST FRIENDS BACK TOGETHER FOR DUMMIES

ARCHIVE OF OUR OWN

Learn To:

Set up your friends on bad dates so they can see they're perfect for each other.

Listen to Celine Dion on repeat.

Listen to them cry about the other person dating someone else when it's your fault to begin with.

Get them back toether for good.

browneyesparker

Getting Your Best Friends Back Together For Dummies
by Brown Eyes Parker

Category: Stranger Things, 2016
Genre: Hurt-Comfort, Romance
Language: English
Characters: Eleven/Jane H., Mike W.
Pairings: Eleven/Jane H./Mike W.
Status: In-Progress
Published: 2019-07-27 20:12:15
Updated: 2019-09-26 16:03:03
Packaged: 2019-12-12 17:34:38
Rating: T
Chapters: 7
Words: 10,702
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: Dustin leaned against the counter. "Okay but what I really want to know is how Max even got Mike to agree to go out on a date in the first place. And who, other than El, would be crazy enough to go out with him?" OR Max tries to get El & Mike to go on blind dates with other people so they'll get back together, and said blind dates start to help out.

1. Chapter 1

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Chapter 1

"This is going to go so bad!" Lucas informed Max as Mike left for the blind date she'd set him up on.

Max flipped her hair over her shoulder impatiently. "Well, that's sort of the point! If it goes wrong, maybe he'll finally realize he and El belong together. I'm tired of them moping around all the time."

"So, the obvious answer is to have them date other people instead of trying to get them together to talk like adults because that makes *perfect* sense."

"Well, it did when I first came up with it!" Max snapped defensively. "I didn't hear you offer that *brilliant* solution when we were talking about ideas on how to get them back together."

"I thought you were *kidding* when you said we should set them up with other people. I didn't think you'd go as far to actually make dates with the poor, unassuming public. Not only is it a *bad* idea, you know Mike won't ever shut up about El."

"I want it to go badly!" Max insisted with the slightest hint of impatience.

"Also, you better hope that El doesn't find out about it. Remember when she thought Mike was into you and she pushed you off your skateboard?"

Max laughed uneasily. "Well, she's not going to find out. Besides, El's more mature now. She's not going to hurt anybody because Mike went out to dinner with them."

"This is Mike and El we're talking about. They can become unreasonable when it comes to each other."

Max snorted, she was thankful she was never *illogical* when it came to

her romantic relationships. She never allowed herself to get that crazy over a boy. All the times Lucas had broken up with her, she had taken it in stride. While lots of girls had gushed over El and Mike's romance, she had hoped it would never happen to her. Dating and boys were nice and all, but she never wanted to let her judgment get clouded and she certainly didn't want to be the cause of anyone being *unreasonable*.

A bedroom door opened and Will appeared looking irritated. "Would the two of you keep it down? I'm trying to study!" he turned to look at Max and shook his head. "Also, what were you thinking? Sending Mike out on a date with somebody else? What if El finds out?"

"The two of you need to *chill*! El isn't going to find out."

"Find out what?" El asked as she came out of the living room with a big blanket wrapped around her shoulders.

"Nothing!" Will asked, shooting Max an out of character dirty look.

Max smiled. "So, do you want ice cream? Or one of those Eggo palooza things you love so much?"

El shook her head. "No thanks, I'm fine."

"Do you want to go to a movie?" Max asked, trailing her to the kitchen.

El sighed. "Max, what are you trying to do? Distract me?"

"No!" Max answered a little too quickly. "Why would you think that?"

El gave her a look and rummaged through the fridge for a bottle of water. "I've known you since I was 13. You've got that look you get when some stupid plan you made backfired."

Max fidgeted with one of her braids and then threw it over her shoulder. "So. . ." she hedged. "How over Mike are you really?"

El narrowed her eyes suspiciously, ignoring the way her heart skipped a beat, as her blanket slipped off her shoulders. "Why?"

"Are you *majorly* over him or are you still in the stage where you're wallowing in sad songs and romantic comedies and eating junk food?"

El huffed and closed the refrigerator. "Max, *what* did you do?" she repeated, trying her best to tamp down her irritation.

"IkindofsentMikeoutonablinddate!" Max blurted out.

El felt her heart constrict in her chest. "You kind of *what*?" even though she knew the answer and didn't want Max to repeat the horrible words.

"I kind of sent Mike out on a blind date!" Max confessed again.

El's whole body grew cold. "He agreed to it?" she asked, her eyes fluttering shut as visions of Mike and some perfect girl, sitting across from each other floated through her mind.

"Did you tell her!?" Lucas yelled from the living room. "Dammit Max! You said she wasn't going to find out!"

"Did he agree to go with her?" El asked over Lucas.

Max floundered for a second, the temptation to use El's obvious jealousy and hurt feelings to her advantage was great. She didn't really want the other girl to know that she had forced Mike into going in a date. It would be easier to put all the blame on him.

Max wondered if El would actually believe Mike would even consider looking at any other girl. He refused to say actresses were objectively pretty.

"*Well?"* El asked.

"I'm sorry El. . ." Max said because she couldn't think of any way to tell her the truth and because she didn't want her to be angry with her.

El turned around and walked back to her bedroom, blanket trailing on the floor behind her. Her door closed and a few seconds later, *No More "I Love You's"* started to play loudly.

"Now I have to go to the library!" Will groaned.

Lucas came into the kitchen and shook his head. "Good going, Maxine. You know she's going to be playing the world's saddest love songs all night now."

Max grabbed her car keys. "Fine, I'll try and fix it."

"I hope you're going to get Mike to come back from his date."

There's nothing some good old-fashioned comfort food can't take care of. Don't do anything stupid while I'm gone."

"Like what? Tell El the *truth*?" Celine Dion started to play and Lucas shuddered. "Why would I do something like that?"

"Oh my. . . *why* is El listening to Celine Dion playing again!?" Dustin asked as he came into the apartment with pizza and movies. "Where's Mike? We were supposed to watch *Superman*."

Lucas snatched the Dominos boxes from Dustin, still annoyed with his girlfriend. "I'm sure Max would love to explain why El is subjecting us all to Celine Dion and Michael's whereabouts right now."

Dustin's mouth fell open as he put all the pieces of the puzzle together. "You did not move forward with your stupid plan."

"Like we could have gotten the two of them to talk to each other," Max defended herself even though she's well aware it's a terrible plan. "In case you haven't noticed, they're ignoring each other right now."

"So, you think if one of them goes on a date with somebody else, they're going to start talking again?" Will asked. "What do you want her to do? Wait for him to get home and then start yelling at him?"

"What? No! I don't want to explain myself. I'm going to get El something to tempt her out of the hole she just fell into. Don't have too much fun while I'm gone."

Dustin leaned against the counter. "Okay but what I really want to know is how Max even got Mike to agree to go out on a date in the

first place. And who, other than *El*, would be crazy enough to go out with him?"

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TBC. . .

Author's Note:

I don't even have words for what this is. Except I will say, I have *every* intention of getting Mike and El back together. This started out as my friend and I head-canoning stuff in our DMs on Twitter, and I decided not to ignore the promptings of my muse. I hope you'll stick with me. Next chapter is from Mike's POV.

Until Next Time!

Love,

Holly

2. Chapter 2

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Chapter 2

A date.

Max had sent him on a *blind date* under the false pretense of it being a tutoring session. Of all the things she had ever done, this took the cake. Sure, he hadn't been moping around the apartment, playing sad songs, and eating his weight in ice cream. But that didn't mean he was over El and ready to start seeing other people yet.

He didn't know what Max was thinking.

His split from El was never supposed to be permanent. He had decided a long time ago, she was the one for him. There was no one who could fill the spot in his heart where she had taken up residence the night he had first set his eyes on her.

"Mike! It's been forever since the last time I saw you!" A voice interrupted his thoughts. Do you want your usual?"

Mike was finally aware of his surroundings, the way Kelley was watching him awkwardly, and how his and El's favorite waitress was waiting to take his order. "Yeah, I'll have my usual. Thanks, Naomi."

Naomi peered over her pad of paper. "El's not with you tonight?"

"Um. . . no. . ." Mike rubbed the back of his neck. "This is Kelley, we're in the same class—"

"I'm his—"

Mike really didn't want her to say she was his *date*. The more people who knew about the breakup, the more of a reality it became. He felt like he was cheating on El, sitting with somebody else in their favorite place to get dinner.

"*Tutor!"* Mike blurted out before he could stop himself. "I'm her tutor!

She's hopeless in science, so I'm helping her out." He couldn't tell if Kelley looked disappointed or angry by his response. "Could I have two Cokes, please?"

"Could I have water instead? I don't drink soda." Kelley leaned back in her seat and looked at Mike. "So, you must come here a lot since they know your order by heart."

He fidgeted with his utensils. "El and I usually grab dinner here on Friday nights before we went to the movies or something."

Kelley made a face, tapping her perfectly manicured fingers on the table and Mike thought about El's chipped nails, usually painted in a variety of colors and wondered how anybody wanted to be so *perfect.*

"So, I guess Max made a mistake when she suggested I meet you here for when she set us up."

Mike shrugged. "Max has a tendency to act first and think much later about the consequences or what could go wrong. El usually reminds her to take a second before plunging headfirst into something."

Strike 2! Mike thought to himself, he had dropped El's name again in the span of minutes. According to Lucas, constant chatter about an ex with somebody, you were on a date with automatically ended with a 'game over'. Not that he *wanted* to score touchdowns or whatever the correct phrase was with Kelley.

"Are you enjoying your classes?" Mike asked lamely, grasping for a subject change.

Kelley shrugged. "It's not like I'm majoring in what I want. I wanted to go to New York City and study fashion. My father thought I needed a degree in something a little more practical. So, I'm majoring in engineering."

"El talked about taking fashion too," Mike said before his brain could catch up with his mouth. "She decided to become a child psychologist though. . . so, she could help kids who had similar backgrounds to her."

Kelley pushed her blonde hair behind her ears and nodded. "I guess

in real life, you need to do something that's going to give you the right kind of opportunities." she paused. "So, um, how long did you and El date before you broke up?"

"We've been together. . . I mean, we were *going* to be together for 10 years in November."

Kelley looked like she was calculating numbers in her head, her eyes widened slightly. "That can't be right! You would have had to have gotten together when you were like. . . *12*!"

Mike nodded. "We were about 12 when we saw each other for the first time." He hoped she would ask him how they had met because he loved talking about it. But he knew she wouldn't, this was supposed to be a *date*. He supposed there *was* a proper protocol for those things, but being with El had been like skipping a few steps.

"Wow. . . 10 years. That's a really long time to be with someone. Weren't you ever curious what other girls were like?"

"No." He still wasn't. But he knew enough about women that he shouldn't say it aloud. Kelley would probably find it more insulting than cute. Although, he didn't think there was nothing wrong with being a little honest. "If I'm telling the truth, I don't know how to be interested in somebody else."

Kelley sighed. "Well, I guess you just have to meet the right person. . . if there is a right person after El."

Mike didn't think Kelley got that there wouldn't be another 'right person', not even if he wound up spending the rest of his life alone.

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When he got home, he felt a little worse for the wear. He'd sat through dinner with Kelley because he had ordered food and had felt bad about wasting a perfectly good cheeseburger. But he could barely swallow, so it didn't matter anyway.

He closed the door behind him and leaned against it. He could hear sad songs coming from El's bedroom. He considered going to talk to her, he had the gut feeling she *knew* he had been with someone else,

and he wanted her to know it didn't mean anything—

"Mike, are you home?" Lucas yelled, interrupting his train of thought.

Mike walked to the living room. "Yeah, I'm back."

Dustin nodded to the boxes of pizza on the worn-out coffee table. "We have leftovers and we waited for you to start *Superman* if you're still interested in watching it with us like we'd originally planned."

"Sorry I wasn't here," Mike mumbled, shifting his gaze back towards El's room.

"It's okay, man! We know you didn't want to go!" Dustin assured him.

"We told Max not to do it," Lucas added.

"So, how was your date with somebody who wasn't El?" Dustin asked.

"*Terrible!"* Mike admitted, omitting the part where he had talked about El all night. It had gotten worse as dinner had progressed, he had broken one of Max's cardinal rules about how *not* to act in front of women and talked about how beautiful his ex was. He could sense how relieved Kelley was when the evening was finally over.

"At least Max was right about one thing," Lucas muttered.

Mike looked confused. "Huh?"

Lucas waved him off. "It doesn't matter."

"Is El okay?"

"She's fine. Except she accidentally found out that you were going out with somebody tonight. So, we've been subjected to every sad song from the last 20 years."

"You know, *now* would be the perfect time to go and talk to her. Tell her tonight didn't mean anything," Dustin said, prodding him in the ribs with his elbow.

Lucas smirked. "You could even mention it *really* was Max's idea just

in case she's not sure."

"I don't think she wants to talk to me right now. . ."

"You never know unless you try," Dustin told him. "Come on, at least let her know it didn't mean anything," he repeated. "She really needs to hear it tonight."

Mike knew Dustin was right but before he could go and knock on El's door, Max breezed into the house with a paper bag. She caught a glimpse of Mike and a look of guilt flitted across her face.

"I'm, um, going to talk to El!" she said quickly, looking at the ground as she sprinted off. "Glad to see you made it home safely, Wheeler!"

Before anybody could stop her, she was banging on El's door and demanding to be let in. El ignored her pleas by turning up the music so loud it sounded like it could break the stereo. Mike knew this was her way of telling everyone to leave her alone.

Max sighed in exasperation, giving up a few seconds later, giving the boys the ice cream she picked up and putting on *Superman* without asking. Lucas for his part avoided saying *I told you so* and went to the kitchen to scoop out bowls of rocky road for everyone.

Towards the end of the movie, Will came home from the library. He tried to get El to turn down the music to no avail. So, he joined the rest of the party in the living room and sat down, cross-legged on the end of the couch.

"Somebody has to fix this," he said.

"I like sleeping as much as you Will, but I'm not sure there's anything we can do," Max replied from her position on the floor.

Will rolled his eyes. "You're the one who drove her to this."

Max held up her empty bowl. "I *tried*."

"Not hard enough—" Dustin interjected as the phone rang, cutting him off mid-sentence.

Max stood up. "I'll get it," she said, thankful for a chance to get away from her friends because they so clearly did *not* get it. She was still waiting for Mike to get angry at her at some point for tricking him the way she had. She could feel the guys' eyes on her as she picked up the receiver, so she turned her back on them. "Hi? Oh, hey Kelley!"

"*Tell her I'm not here!"* Mike hissed loud enough for her to hear as he shrunk into the couch, panic started to set in like Kelley was on the front porch and not in her own apartment.

He had a sickening thought that maybe she wanted to go on another date with him because tonight hadn't been bad enough. He would have to find the words to tell her that he didn't have the capacity to love anyone else. Not the way he loved El, not period.

Mike just didn't know how to let anyone down easily.

TBC. . .

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Author's Note:

Yeah, mark this chapter down as not knowing how to end it but not knowing how to continue it either. Real talk, I almost deleted this and started from scratch. But I'm trying this whole new thing where I don't chase my version of perfection. If you're still with me, I hope you'll tell me what you thought. . .

Until Next Time!

Love,

Holly

3. Chapter 3

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Chapter 3

"So, you managed to send me on the worst date of my life," Kelley told Max.

"I know," Max said, having the decency to look a little guilty. "I was kind of *hoping* it would be bad. . . the two of them, they're kind of ridiculous and I was hoping it would give them the push to get back together."

Kelley took a sip of her latte. "Why did they break up?"

Max sighed. "I don't know. I guess Mike's sister made some comment back at Christmas about how it must be interesting to be with the same person for 9 years. Mike, being the kind of person he is, took this to mean that El needed to find out what she was *missing* out on. So, he broke up with her. He's kind of been a loser ever since though. But we've seen him like this before. It's actually kind of pathetic, the way the two of them act like they're so lost without each other—"

"You don't really think they're pathetic," Kelley interrupted. "If you did, I don't think you would be trying to get them back together this hard."

"They're good together," Max admitted. "For as long as I've known them, they've been this little army of two. For better or for worse, they're each other's person. El certainly hasn't gone out and found somebody else to see what she's missing out on. I don't think it's ever crossed her mind."

"Mike never outright said El was it for him, but from what I gathered the feeling is mutual." Kelley folded her hands in front of her. "He's adorable but I'm not going to be the person who stands in the way of true love. So, I want to help you get them back together. But we have to have better ideas than setting them up on a blind date with other people. You can't unleash El some poor unsuspecting soul."

"She will probably be as bad as Mike. . ." Max's face twisted into a smile. "It would kind of be hilarious, actually. But El can't be fooled as easily fooled as Mike can be and that might be a good thing."

"Has anybody told you blind dates are the worst idea?"

"Huh? Oh yeah, my friends might have mentioned it a *few* times to me. But it's not like they had better ideas. Will wanted to lock them in a room until they got back together. Have you ever heard of something like that working?" Max held up her hand. "I know my idea hasn't exactly worked out either because one bad date with you and Mike still hasn't asked El to be his girlfriend again."

Kelley nodded. "Right because he was supposed to know what was going on."

"For someone so smart, he's kind of dumb."

"Well, I'm sure between the two of us and your other friends we can think of something to get them back together."

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El pulled on a sweatshirt and leggings and walked to the kitchen in search of coffee. She was thankful it was Saturday because her eyes were swollen and gritty from crying all night. She really didn't want anyone to see her.

Mike had gone out with somebody else.

The thought made her heart constrict painfully and then it stopped completely when she saw the object of her affection sitting at the table, his shoulders hunched while he ate Cheerios and read the newspaper.

Like usual, he could sense they were in the same room. Their eyes met and she realized he looked just as bad as she felt. She wondered if he had sat up all night, staring at the ceiling listening to Jeff Buckley and thinking about how much he wanted her back.

He broke up with you, El reminded herself.

You let him, a voice that sounded a lot like Joyce's added.

"El, I didn't know. . ."

It was the first time Mike had spoken to her directly since January. It was enough to make her turn around and listen to him. "You didn't know what?"

"M-erm, somebody told me that Kelley needed tutoring. So, I went. . . I didn't know until I got there it was a date."

"I overreacted," El lied. "I know we're supposed to be seeing what we missed out on by being together for so long."

It's stupid, tell him it's stupid!

"Yeah. . ." Mike trailed off and scrubbed his face with both his hands.

"Did you like her?" El didn't realize how much the question sounded like a trap until the words had left her mouth.

"Did I like her? I don't know. I talked almost the whole time. I'm pretty sure she started to tune me out by the time it was over."

"Doesn't sound like anything new to me." El broke out into a smile despite her best efforts to keep a straight face.

Mike shook his head, the mood considerably lightened. "I really hope you believe me, El. . . if I had known, I wouldn't have gone."

"Don't worry about it," El said as she turned around to continue looking for coffee.

"I just made a pot of coffee," Mike told her. "You could have some if you'd like. There's more than enough for two people."

El smiled gratefully and nodded. "That would be nice, thank you."

Mike pushed his bowl of soggy cereal away and jumped up from the table to prepare it for her. He grabbed her favorite mug from the cabinet and poured some of the dark brew into it, making sure he added a liberal amount of cream and sugar just the way she liked it.

Because she was really more of a fan of soda, but she could drink more coffee without the guilt of Coke.

He wanted to make up for the night before and serving her felt like the only way he could do it. "Do you want some breakfast?" he asked.

"That's okay. I'm not that hungry," El replied her stomach grumbling despite her words.

"You should eat something. . . I think we have one more cinnamon bagel left, you better get it before Max does."

El grinned sheepishly. "Fine. But don't think for a second that I don't know what you're doing. You always take extra good care of me after you've done something wrong. Whether it was imagined or for real." she bit her bottom lip. "I can 100 percent assure you, you really didn't do anything wrong. I *knew* it would happen eventually."

Mike contemplated telling her that he didn't even think about dating other people. He'd only done it for her, to give her the opportunity to see what *she* was missing out on by being with him. He couldn't imagine how she would react to him saying that though.

He knew her well enough to know she'd probably get angry at him. She hated it when people made decisions for her, a lasting effect of Max's influence on her. Maybe in retrospect, he *had* done the wrong thing by breaking up with her. But there was no way he could take it back now, no matter how much he wanted to. He didn't know how to.

Not without looking like a complete idiot or without her rejecting him.

It would serve him right for being the world's biggest idiot.

But maybe. . .

He looked up at her, butter knife posed over the block of cream cheese. "Hey, El. . ."

"Yeah, Mike?"

"Do you think we could start over again. . . as friends?"

"Yeah, I'd like that," she replied, nodding slightly. "I'd like that a lot."

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"Max," Lucas groaned. "I can't believe you've roped more people into trying to help Mike and El get back together."

Will sighed. "Yeah, I think we just need to let things happen naturally from now on. Your plan didn't work last night, I can't imagine that you're going to come up with anything better than sending them out on blind dates."

"Aren't you willing to give it a try? El and Mike's happiness is at stake."

Dustin shook his head. "I'm with Will on this one. Maybe we should leave it alone now. I can't imagine how Mike would react if El went out with somebody."

Max rolled her eyes. "First of all, he'd probably tell himself it was what he deserved since he went out on a date. Second of all, since all that resulted in it was El listening to sad music all night, we need to come up with another idea. Kelley says she has some good ideas on how to do it. Come on guys, let's just make one more ditch effort to get them back together. If it doesn't work this time, we'll give up."

There were times Lucas just had to give into Max, he wasn't a horrible boyfriend, after all, so he sighed, caving quickly. "Fine! But if it doesn't work this time then you are giving up. One more chance, Max. You better use it well."

TBC. . .

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Author's Note:

Sorry for the late update! We lost power last night, so I didn't get the chance to finish this. A quick note before leave, since I conceived this story, I played around with the idea of Mike and

El secretly becoming a couple again while the rest of the Party tried to get them back together. The more I thought about it, I decided that I'd have them sneak around and just be friends again. I hope you're still with me. After all, I did say this was the *Dummies* guide to getting your best friends back together.

Hope you'll leave a review!

Until Next Time!

Love,
Holly

4. Chapter 4

Tank03, Stranger Records. . . thank you for your reviews on chapter 3. Also, a big thank you to adventuretimetbh, TorontoBatFan, SmoothFluffle, Ry0523, and Guest for their reviews on the first two chapters.

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Chapter 4

"We could lock them in a room together until they start to talk again."

Will shook his head. "Didn't that happen on a television episode once? Besides, you know El doesn't handle being confined very well."

Max opened her mouth like she was going to say something but Lucas shook his head. "You only get one more chance Max. Choose your idea carefully."

"I was just going to say, I don't think it's such a bad idea to lock them in a room together. El will panic and Mike won't be able to help himself, he'll comfort her. . . and I just realized how dumb I sound."

"Mike will also get mad at whoever's idea it was to lock them in the room in the first place," Dustin told her.

Kelley wrinkled her nose. "Wow. Mike and El. . . they really have an intense relationship, don't they?"

"You have *no* idea," Max said. "You're just lucky she hasn't decided to extract some sort of revenge on you. One time, she thought Mike had a crush on me and—"

"El's not going to come after you!" Dustin interrupted before Max could reveal one of the Party's well-guarded secret and manage to strike fear into Kelley all in one go.

"Mike and El just get each other in a way no one else gets them," Will pointed out gently. "I'm sure you have some kind of understanding

about that or you wouldn't be here helping."

"If it'll save girls from going out on crummy dates with Mike Wheeler, I'm glad to help!" Kelley replied cheerfully.

"Mike has the capacity to be a good boyfriend!" Lucas defended his best friend. "He just saves it all for El."

"I was talking to Steve a few nights ago and he suggested we should set them up on a date with *each other*," Dustin interjected before a fight could break out.

"Mike's not going to go on another blind date," Kelley said. "He doesn't seem like the kind of guy you can fool twice. Besides how many girls are you going to put through dates with him?"

"*No!* We leave them notes from each other and make them think the other person wants to get dinner," Dustin explained like she was in kindergarten. "It's sort of an ambush. They'll both show up at the same place, at the same time and they'll *have* to talk."

"They could easily just go and ask if the other person sent them a note."

Will sighed. "I have a shift at the comic book store in 20 minutes and this is not going anywhere productive. Maybe we can adjourn the meeting for now and come back later with a more willingness to listen to other people's ideas?"

Everyone agreed. Satisfied, Will went to get ready for work.

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Alone Again (Naturally) was playing when Will got back to their house.

"Is El still wallowing? He asked sympathetically, glancing at Mike who was working on his homework and fidgeting with an unruly curl.

"El?" Mike repeated. "Oh, yeah. I guess so. . . I haven't seen her all morning."

Will looked slightly disappointed. "I thought you would talk to El and explain things."

Mike looked slightly guilty. "I would have. . . but I didn't see her at all, I swear Will."

Even though the truth was, they had been together the whole morning and El had fled when she heard the door open. Mostly because they didn't want anybody to find out they were trying to be friends again. It would lead to questions and El had told him that she wasn't ready for people to ask if they were getting back together just because they were talking again.

Will sighed. "It's okay. I can ask her to turn it down if you're having trouble concentrating."

"I'm fine! *She's* fine!" Mike hurried to assure him, suddenly very aware of his odd behavior. "Just leave her alone. . . let her deal with whatever she needs to deal with."

"Okay. . ." Will agreed. "Maybe talk to her when you get a chance though. Okay? Maybe *you* can handle another night of heart wrenching music. But the rest of us *can't*."

Mike nodded. "Don't worry about it, Will. I'll talk to her, I promise."

"Good. I'm sure if you don't fix it soon, Hop will come for a visit and make sure you do. I have to hurry or I'll be late for work."

Mike really hoped Will wasn't talking to his stepfather about the situation with El. But Will never made threats lightly or emptily. He considered for a second telling him that everything was okay but he didn't want to betray El's confidence that way.

He was going to let her have complete control going forward.

When Will had left, Mike went and knocked on El's door, signaling the coast was clear.

"I told Will I would talk to you about last night," Mike said. "So, maybe don't play every single sad song when everyone gets home tonight. I think you managed to annoy all our roommates."

El smiled sheepishly as she turned off her stereo. "Did I annoy you?"

"Not really. I kind of took it as penance."

"Michael Wheeler, you are probably the most ridiculous boy that I've ever met," El said affectionately.

Mike thought about saying *'yeah but you love me anyway'* but couldn't bring himself to be that flirtatious. He felt like he was standing on shaky ground with her and that he had to tread carefully, or he'd be likely to mess everything up again and that was the last thing he wanted to do.

He sighed and fluttered his eyelashes. "I know."

"I've got to go now," El told him. "It's my turn to grocery shop. I'll stop by the comic book store and let Will know I'm fine and let him know I'll quit playing music so everyone can sleep."

Mike nodded. "Okay."

"See you soon," El said as she grabbed her denim jacket and the list Will had left for her.

Mike followed her to the door, he almost asked her if he could go with her. But he hesitated long enough for her to give him a side-hug and say goodbye before leaving the house with the quickest glance over her shoulder.

He sighed and reminded himself how stupid he was.

Again.

TBC. . .

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Author's Note:
I am sorry for the delay in posting this chapter. I was with my sister and it's hard to edit and post from my Chrome Book. This is not as long as I would have liked it to be and I apologize for that. But I hope you liked what I was able to deliver and that

you will stick around for the next one.

Until Next Time!

Love,
Holly

5. Chapter 5

Shout-Outs:
Bonzenz, Guest - your question about the blind date will be cleared up in this chapter, Exploding Helmets, and Stranger Records

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Chapter 5

El was trying to decide between Froot Loops and Cheerios. For the first time since she and Mike had broken up, she felt calmer. She had missed having him in her life, they hadn't talked since the split. Since she knew his schedule, it had been easy to avoid him. She had gone out of her way to do it, she had to if it was going to be a proper breakup.

She chucked the Froot Loops in the carriage and added Lucky Charms, Lucas could purchase his own Cheerios. She navigated around a mother with her young kids and picked out a loaf of bread while she imagined what getting back together with Mike would look like.

It wasn't optional anymore. It was *going* to happen, even if she had to ask him out herself. Even if she had to be the one to say *'let's be boyfriend and girlfriend again'*. 4 months had been plenty of time for her to realize what she was missing out on. As far as she was concerned, it hadn't been much. She wasn't interested in anyone *except* for Mike. Sure, she hadn't given any of them a fair chance. She had shut down offers of study dates and movie nights so fast, potential suitors' heads had spun.

Eventually, they stopped asking.

It had defeated the purpose of Mike's ending things with her. But she didn't need to explore other options for her to know she would never wake up and regret her life with him.

She would have to make sure he knew that when they became a

couple again.

She was so preoccupied with her thoughts, she accidentally ran into somebody. The sound of eggs breaking was enough to pull her out of her own mind and back into reality.

"I'm so sorry!" she apologized. "I wasn't paying attention to where I was going."

"It's okay!" he assured her. "Oh, hi El."

El suddenly realized it was somebody in her children's lit class. "Oh, hi Jeff," she echoed, suddenly feeling awkward as she shifted from one foot to another.

She didn't have a crush on him but he reminded her so much of Mike with his easy smile, kind spirit, and how smart he was that sometimes she got flustered around him.

He leaned against his shopping cart and grinned at her. "Busy Saturday?"

"Not really. It's just my turn to food shop," El answered. "I should go and get somebody to clean up the mess."

"It's okay, Cricket already went and got somebody!" Jeff assured her. "Have you started reading The Trumpet of the Swan yet?"

In all her angst, El had completely forgotten to start her reading assignment. She mentally face palmed herself. "No," she admitted. "How about you? Did you already start it?"

"I've already read it before. It was one of my favorites growing up. Are you having trouble getting into it? Personally, I think it's one of E.B White's best books. . ." he trailed off when he saw El shaking her head. "I'm boring you."

"What? No, I'm just having trouble starting it. I have a lot going on right now."

"If you want, we could meet up and I could give you one of my copies with all my notes in it. Maybe it'll help inspire you to actually read

it."

"Okay," El agreed automatically. "I'd like that. . ." she paused, thinking about how uncomfortable it would be to meet up with him just to get a book. "Actually, just drop it off at my apartment one day. It would probably be easier that way."

"I'm not asking you out!" he assured her. "Just offering my help as a classmate and a friend."

"Oh." El felt instantly relieved, she didn't know how she would tell him that she was trying to get back together with her ex or how it would sound.

A pretty girl with dark, curly hair that fell to her chin and wire-rimmed glasses came up to them. "Somebody will be coming to clean up the mess in a sec," she told him as she slipped her hand through Jeff's. "Hi, I'm Cricket."

"I'm El. . . Jeff and I are in one of the same classes."

Cricket nodded and El suddenly got the odd feeling she was intruding on something.

"El!" Max shouted, interrupting their conversation. "What are you doing here?"

"Food shopping," El answered, turning around, she frowned. "What are you doing here?"

Lucas held up the bottle of soda he was holding. "We were in the neighborhood. Max had a craving for Coke."

"We can help you finish the food shopping," Max offered, glancing at Jeff.

"Should I wait and offer to pay for the eggs?" El asked.

This sort of stuff happens all the time," Jeff assured her. "Clean up on aisle 5," he joked. "You can go now, I'll handle it."

"Thank you. It was nice meeting you Cricket."

Cricket waved. "You too!"

Max pulled the cart from El when they were out of earshot. "You guys looked pretty cozy."

"I pushed my cart into him and broke his eggs. I don't think you could call that *cozy*," El replied as she took the carriage back.

Lucas rolled his eyes. "Don't get any ideas Max," he muttered.

El frowned. "Wait. Do you think I have a *crush* on him?"

"Do you?"

Lucas stepped on her foot. "Stop it, Max!" he said warningly.

El looked at them suspiciously. "What's going on?"

"Nothing!" Lucas answered. "Max is just being ridiculous right now."

"Step on my foot again and we'll be ridiculously broken up!" Max said sweetly, smiling at him.

El sighed and pushed her cart away from them, so much for her quiet grocery store trip. She imagined Max and Lucas would argue the rest of the time.

"Hey El, you forgot to get Cheerios!" Lucas said. "They were on the list."

"Get your own healthy cereal," Max told him. "I want to talk to El in private."

"Uh. . ."

Max gave him a look that said he didn't really have a choice and fell into step beside El. "SO, Jeff. . ."

"I think he likes that girl he was with," El interjected before Max could suggest something like asking him out on a date or something equally as humiliating. "Her name's Cricket."

Max wrinkled her nose. "Cricket?" she smirked. "Did he say she was

his girlfriend? Like did he say *this is my girlfriend Cricket*?"

"Does he have to introduce her as his girlfriend for them to be dating?"

"Mike did, didn't he?"

El huffed. "Mike's different than most guys. Does Lucas ever say *this is my girlfriend, Max* when he introduces you to people?"

"Sometimes. . . but you're right, not really. UGH."

"Ugh, what?" Lucas asked as he returned. "Max, I hate to inform you that Jeff and the girl are dating. He's in my history class and I see them together *all the time*. Last week, she kissed him after dropping him off for class."

"Why are you so set on my going out with him?" El made a sharp turn down the frozen food aisle and started to get French fries.

"Don't you want to make Mike jealous?"

"No? Why would I want to do that?"

"To give him a taste of his own medicine."

El sighed. "Come on, we're not 14 anymore. I don't think it would be that effective." She tore the list. "Make yourself useful and get some of the stuff on the list, okay? I'll meet you at the checkout."

Lucas gave her a stern look when they were alone. "Would you *just* stop being a troublemaker?"

"Okay! Okay! But I'm not giving up so easily. I'm going to find the right thing to push their buttons and I *will* get them back together!"

Lucas just grabbed the piece of paper El had given them and walked away.

TBC. . .

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Author's Note:

I wanted to have this chapter ready for Friday but you know what they say about the best-laid plans. My aunt, uncle, and cousins were here all week and then Friday was mostly spent getting ready for my sister-in-law's belated birthday celebration. I also hate to admit, I spent the first part of my week writing and then scrapping a one-shot to It's Nice To Have a Friend by Taylor Swift (have no fear, I WILL write a Mileven story to it eventually). I hope you liked this chapter, tell me what you thought! More soon!

Until Next Time!

Love,
Holly

6. Chapter 6

Shout-outs to: Guest, Stranger Records, Guest, Tank03

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Chapter 6

"We could tell him about Jeff," Max suggested as she grabbed a handful of barbecue potato chips.

"I already told you that was a *no*," Lucas reminded her. "Of all the ideas you've come up with, that's the stupidest."

Will chewed on his bottom lip. "Maybe we should just give up on trying to get them back together. Let them get back together all on their own. This *is* Mike and El we're talking about, they always find their way back to each other eventually."

"Don't you think it would have happened by now? Isn't this like the second-longest time they've been apart since they found each other all those years ago," Max said.

"The first time really wasn't their fault though," Lucas replied. "He thought she was gone and then Hop was the one keeping them apart. The only other time they broke up was kind of your fault."

"Hey! I *resent* that! I didn't know she was going to take it so literally!" Max objected. "Besides, it wasn't like she officially dumped him or anything. . . since she didn't know what it meant at the time."

Will held up his hand to cut the conversation short. "You know what all those things had in common? None of us interfered. I'm getting really tired of trying to come up with ways to get them back together. We're all about to graduate from college and you can't come up with anything better than blind dates and locking them in rooms. Lucas, don't even try and take the high ground here. For all your protests, you haven't really done anything to stop this plan to try and get them back together."

"It's not like you did either!"

"Yeah, well, it was fun until Max lied to Mike and El got hurt because of it." Will paused like he was weighing what he was going to say next. "Also, if you made Mike think El had a crush on Jeff, more than two people could wind up being collateral damage—"

"Hi, guys!" Kelley interrupted. "Plotting without me, I see."

Max sighed. "Not really but you did miss a lecture from Will."

"I wasn't lecturing you guys!" Will protested. "I just suggested that maybe we should *chill out* and allow them to handle it. I think we're underestimating their feelings for each other if we think they need our help."

Kelley hesitated. "Maybe Will does have a point," she hedged. "Of course I haven't spent as much time with them as you all have. But I have witnessed first-hand just how strongly Mike feels about El."

"She's just as crazy about him," Will told her.

"You should consider yourself lucky that you never had to deal with them together," Dustin added as he slid into the booth. "Think about the sappiest romantic comedy you've ever seen and multiply it by a thousand. Hi, guys! Hey Will, are you going to eat the rest of those French fries?"

"These are cold. I'll order more," Will answered, waving down their waitress.

"So, what did I miss?"

"If you're asking if we've come up with a good idea, the answer is no. Will did suggest we just give up though."

"I didn't say *give up*!" Will insisted. "I just said we should let them figure it out by themselves."

"Will does have a point." Dustin looked at the waitress. "Can I have a Coke and more French fries, please?"

"If we did decide to leave them alone, we'd really have to leave them alone. That would mean not orchestrating any operations behind the

rest of the party's back," Will said firmly.

"Why is everybody looking at *me*?" Max asked innocently.

"You are the person who arranged a blind date without the rest of us knowing."

"*You* knew!" Max argued.

"We didn't agree though—"

Kelly sighed. "We've been through this already. Don't you guys ever get tired of arguing about the same things over and over again? "

"No!" Everyone chorused together looking shocked by the suggestion.

"We'll stop though," Will said hastily, giving everyone a look that tried to convey for everyone to chill out.

Max put her hands up in the air. "Okay, we'll just give up then."

"We're not giving up. We're just backing off," Will corrected gently. "I am sure you'll see everything will turn out alright. We just have to be patient."

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Mike watched as El poured over her textbook. He was supposed to be studying for a test but he was trying to rememorize what she looked like after not really being able to see her for months. Surrounded by sunlight and Mendelssohn, he couldn't get over how beautiful she was. It went without saying, he had missed her.

When he sighed audibly, she glanced up from her notes. "Everything okay?" she asked.

He swallowed. "Yes," he replied. "I'm just. . ." he trailed off, thinking about telling her that he wasn't in the mood to study. But she would know something was up because usually, he couldn't shut up about how much he loved school.

El glanced at the clock. "You must be hungry," she said as she stood

up and changed the classical station to something that played pop songs. "It's past lunchtime now. I'll make sandwiches."

"You know you don't have to take care of me."

El smiled at him. "I want to. Friends take care of each other."

Mike cringed, *friends*. Of course, she had to say there were just friends. He didn't have too long to ruminate on the fact because there was a knock.

"I'll get it," he mumbled.

"Thanks, Mike!" she replied cheerfully as she got cheese from the fridge.

Mike peeked through the curtains, a habit he had picked up when keeping El a secret had still been important. Jeff from his British Lit class was standing on the concrete porch. He frowned, wondering if he had forgotten about exchanging class notes as he unlocked the door and opened it.

"Hey, Mike!" Jeff said cheerfully.

"Hi, Jeff. . ." Mike replied. "How's it going?"

"Good! Good! You ready for the exam on Monday?"

"I've been studying for it all morning," Mike admitted. "How about you?"

"Me too. I finally had to take a break, if I had to try to remember one more fact about Jane Austen, my brain was going to explode!"

Mike nodded. "We just took a break to eat lunch. You can come in if you want to."

"That's okay. I can't stay long, I actually came to see El for a second."

"El?" Mike repeated, feeling something like hot panic start to grow in his chest.

"Yeah. Is she here?"

For a second, Mike considered lying and saying that she wasn't. But he had said *we* stopped to take a break for lunch. Afraid that Jeff could see right through him, he excused himself to go and get her.

While he waited for her to get back, he paced around the kitchen fretting about what Jeff could possibly want with El. He wondered if she would say yes to whatever he asked. With high cheekbones and dark curls, he wasn't sure *any* girl would say no to a date with him.

After what seemed like an eternity, El returned laughing and with a book in her hand.

For a second, Mike considered asking her what had happened but then he decided to mind his own business even though the anxiety was growing in the pit of his stomach and he felt like he was going to be sick.

"I have to go," he told her.

El's smile faded. "Come on Mike, I'm making grilled cheese! I'd really like it if you stayed."

Mike grappled for something to say. "I have a shift at the hospital. I volunteered to read to the kids," he lied, cringing inwardly after the words left his mouth.

"You have to eat something before you go!"

"It's fine," Mike replied, going to the table and closing his books, deciding he would go and hang out with the children in the pediatrics wing because he couldn't bear being dishonest with El. "I'll eat something when I get there."

El looked confused. "Okay," she finally agreed, she gave him a devastatingly puzzled look. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No!' Mike shook his head. "Not at all. . . I just. . . I have to go."

If El wanted to say something else, she didn't vocalize it. Mike knew he should have said something to her, asked her if there was

anything going on with her and Jeff. But he didn't want to hear her say yes. It would just be easier to disappear for a little bit while he tried to process how he felt and if he would say anything, throw his hat back in the ring and fight for her heart.

He would do it if he had to. But the saddest, most pathetic thing was. . . he didn't know how.

TBC. . .

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Author's Note:

You could think about Jeff as a young Tom Welling. Anyway. Sorry for the long wait between updates, someone asked me to add more to my chapters. This is probably not as long as it could have been but I am glad I added the few paragraphs that I *did*. Don't you love the miscommunication troupe? Or the *lack* of communication troupe in this case. I promise everything will be made right in the end. Drop a review in the comments, if you would like! Looking forward to hearing from you.

Until Next Time!

Love,
Holly

7. Chapter 7

Shout-Outs: grievesforyou, Stranger Things, tank03, Exploding Helmets, and HarTREEGrove

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Chapter 7

El frantically cleaned the house like the Party's parents were coming for a visit because she didn't know what else to do with herself. She hadn't been able to stomach her lunch or sit still long enough to start *The Trumpet of the Swan*. She was trying to pull Max's skateboard out from under the couch when everyone got home from doing whatever they were doing that afternoon.

"Wow, is Karen coming for a visit?" Max asked as she dropped her backpack in the middle of the hallway.

Will turned down the music that was blasting from the kitchen counter. "What happened? Is everything okay El?"

"No. . ." El abandoned cleaning up, sitting helplessly in the middle of the living room floor.

"Karen is coming for a visit?"

El shook her head. "No. Mike. . ."

"What did he do now?" Lucas asked, eyeing Max impatiently.

"Why are you looking at me?"

"El, what happened?" Dustin interjected before an argument could break out.

El hesitated and then sighed. "Mike didn't do anything. We were just. . . studying and then Jeff showed up to bring me a book for our lit class. He thought it would make it easier for me to start reading—"

Max's eyes lit up. "Jeff showed up *here*?"

"He was here for, like, 2 minutes and all he was doing was bringing me something for an assignment!" El insisted.

"Did you tell Mike that?"

"He left before I got the chance to explain what was going on."

Max looked absolutely triumphant. "He was jealous."

Lucas rolled his eyes. "Stop gloating. It's not like you had anything to do with it. This was just a lucky coincidence."

El eyed them suspiciously. "What are you guys talking about?"

Max couldn't stop the guilty look from spreading across her face. "Well. . . here's the thing—"

"We've been trying to get you and Mike back together!" Will interjected saying it before he could stop himself. "Well, mostly we've talked about how we would do it. Except for the one time when Max decided she would go rouge and put one of her half-baked plans into action."

"That blind date," El said.

"Yeah. . ." Max shrugged sheepishly. "It worked, didn't it? You were jealous."

El huffed. "You shouldn't do that kind of stuff. I'm sure it violates the Party rules somehow. Is Jeff your doing too?"

"Ha! Mike came up with that problem all by himself. I'm sure he ran out without even bothering to ask you what Jeff wanted, right?"

El looked at her warily and sighed. "Max," she said warningly.

"Mike can overreact sometimes but he always comes around," Will added helpfully. "I'm sure he'll come back from wherever he is, willing to listen to whatever explanation you have for him."

"Jeff just brought over a book for a class assignment. He has a girlfriend. . . I think. . ."

"*I told you!*" Lucas interjected.

"I was going to ask him if we could get back together," El continued, ignoring him. "Eventually."

"Wait! Were the two of you actually talking again!?" Dustin asked, looking surprised.

El nodded. "Yeah, we just didn't want to tell you because you guys have a tendency to overreact and we wanted to keep it between the two of us for just a little bit."

Max looked incredulous. "When did this happen?"

"After the blind date," El replied, sighing again.

Max's mouth dropped open. "You mean. . . it actually *worked*?"

"Hardly!" Lucas scoffed. "It was probably just a very lucky coincidence. We still had to listen to hours of music and they didn't actually get back together because he went on a date with Kelley. They just started to talk again."

"We decided to be friends again." El smiled. "It was kind of fun going behind your backs."

Dustin shook his head. "We're all a bunch of dummies. . ."

"Now I have to go and talk to Mike," El said. "I need to explain what's going on and let him know I'm not interested in anyone else except for him and then. . . I guess we'll see what happens after that."

"What are you going to do? Show up wherever he is and declare you love him like some soppy lead for a romantic comedy?"

El stood up and kicked the skateboard under the couch. "In case you haven't noticed, I *am* the soppy lead in a romantic comedy, Max. I always have been and I don't even care."

"Are you going out dressed like that?" Dustin asked, looking at her baggy sweats and New Kids On the Block concert t-shirt critically.

"I hardly think Mike's going to care what she looks like. . . "

". . .maybe she should change though. He likes that floral mini-dress, right?"

"If you're going to go all out, you should put some makeup on while you're at it. . ."

El put up her hand to quiet them down. "Thanks but I've got this handled."

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Mike rearranged the pile of *Highlights* for the second time in a row before turning his attention to the worn out collection of videotapes. He was trying to find the case for *Gidget Goes to Hawaii* when El appeared in his line of vision.

Kneeling on the ground, he was struck by how powerful all 5 feet, 4 inches of her really was. He dropped the VHS box he was holding and scrambled to his feet.

"You left," she said, pulling at the hem of her skirt and looking at him wide-eyed and serious. "Why?"

"I told you. . . I forgot I volunteered this afternoon," Mike said even though it sounded more like a lie than ever now.

"You never forget volunteer hours. Besides, it looks to me. . . you aren't volunteering. You usually read to the kids—"

"The playroom needed to be cleaned," Mike interrupted, which was not a lie. When he had shown up unexpectedly, Maggie had been more than happy to put him to work. "Maybe I'll read to them later."

"You know Jeff is seeing a girl named Cricket."

Mike's heart started to beat a little faster than usual. "Cricket? That sounds like a made-up name." even though he knew he had seen her hanging outside the British lit classroom, waiting for Jeff to come out, he had barely noticed her though because she wasn't El. Now, he tried to recall the details of what she looked like.

"Well, it's not made-up. I saw them together at the store last Saturday," El retorted, interrupting his train of thought as she tucked her hair behind her ears. "Which, by the way, is when Jeff told me he would drop off a book for me to use for a school assignment."

"A book?" Mike repeated dumbly.

"*Trumpet of the Swan*, we're reading it in our children's lit class. I've kind of been distracted lately and he was trying to help me catch up. Because he's just that kind of guy, he sort of reminds me of you actually."

Somehow, during their conversation, they had met in the middle of the playroom.

"He reminded you of me, huh?" Mike ran his fingers through his hair. "That doesn't make me feel any better, you know."

"Well, I probably wouldn't have ever given him a thought except I broke his eggs at the grocery store and I *had* to talk to him."

"You didn't come here to talk about *Jeff*, did you?"

"Oh. . . um, no. Did you know our '*friends'* have been conspiring to get us back together?"

Mike looked surprised. "They have?"

"I guess they haven't really been able to put a plan into action. Except Max—"

"Went behind everyone's backs and set me up with Kelley," Mike guessed. "What was she trying to accomplish?"

"I guess she was hoping I would be jealous."

"You *were* and we did start talking again afterward," Mike pointed out. "Not that I would ever give Max the satisfaction of knowing she did something right."

El daringly reached out for his hand. "There's something else." she could see the glimmer of hope in his eyes, she knew what it looked

like in his face. "I probably should have said this when you broke up with me. . . I know I don't want anybody else except for you. I think if I was going to find something better, I would have by now."

"Huh?" Mike looked confused.

"We should have never broken up," she explained slowly. "We both know neither of us was ever going to find anybody else. It was very. . . short-sighted of *you* to think we needed to see what we were missing out on."

Mike grinned. "You're so cute when you use big words."

El smiled. "Thank you. Anyway, are we going to get back together or not?"

Mike looked taken aback. "What?"

"I don't know about you but I want to get back together," El said.

Mike laughed. "Just like that. No big romantic gesture or anything?"

"Does there have to be a big romantic gesture? We're going to be together for the rest of our lives. We'll have plenty of time for that."

Mike nodded. "Right. Well, for your information, I was planning on getting back together with you eventually."

"It was taking you too long. It's taking too long *right now*—"

Mike leaned in and kissed her, interrupting her flow of words. "I think I'm going to have to get used to saying *you're right dear*," he said, beaming at her. "I love you."

El smirked. "I know."

Mike laughed ruefully and shook his head. "I guess I deserve that."

"I love you too."

They didn't say anything again for a long time. Mike was content just to hold her for a little while.

The End

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Author's Note:
Comedy, I don't know her. . . although, for a second, I imagined a world where one of the patients interrupted them with "El and Mike are kissing *again*!" Anyway. Thank you for sticking with me on this journey, I enjoyed writing this. I hope you enjoyed reading it. Looking forward to hearing your thoughts on this final chapter. I have more coming soon.

Until Next Time!

Love,
Holly